DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 106 HE 017 768

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TITLE In Search of a More Relevant Business and Management Education.
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Administration Education; *College Curriculum; Educational Change; *General Education; Higher Education; *Integrated Curriculum; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Liberal Arts; *Relevance (Education)

ABSTRACT

Reasons for changing the way business and management students are educated are considered, along with the results of a survey of almost 200 personnel managers from major employers in the greater Rocky Mountain area. Currently, in many business and management curricula, general education courses are taught during the first 2 years and business courses are taught in the last 2 years of college. It is suggested that a businessman or manager's formal education should include a number of arts and sciences courses, not segregated and separated from business and management courses, but integrated throughout the curriculum. In order to understand the nature of discrimination in management, personnel management and sociology courses might be taken simultaneously, rather than being separated by a year or more of coursework. To better appreciate business-government relations, political science courses might also be taken at the same time as business courses. The survey of personnel managers identified courses or types of classes considered by employers to be most important in preparing students for management. Of particular importance were written and oral communication courses. Three major forces that further indicate a need to integrate courses are: the impact of high technology, the growing importance of international business, and the increasing complexity of business and management. (SW)

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IN SEARCH OF A MORE RELEVANT BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

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IN SEARCH OF A MORE RELEVANT
BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

On page twenty-six to twenty-eight of the 1983-84 AACSB Accreditation Council Policies, Procedures, and Standards, AACSB (the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business) sets forth its recommendations and guidelines for curriculum in management and business education. Of particular interest is the following statement on page twenty-six.

"...An undergraduate school of business should concentrate its professional courses in the last two years of a four year program and should offer only a limited amount of work below the junior year..."

While the idea of providing some "baseline education" prior to a professional program is undoubtedly appropriate, such a policy or standard has the literal affect of segregating "general education requirements" from "business and management education" requirements in such a way as to create in the minds of students, and perhaps faculty, administrators, and advisors alike, the idea or image that general education courses are something to be endured, a necessary evil, until the student can get on with what he or she really came to college to do - study business.

The unfortunate by-product of such a standard and approach to business and management education is that it lends little meaning and relevance to general education courses taken by business students because it virtually eliminates any tie or relationship, in both time and space, in the mind of the student between general education courses and business courses.

The net result of this approach to business and management

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education is the education of functional specialists in the various business and management disciplines (i.e. Accounting, Marketing, Finance, Personnel, etc.) to the exclusion of the more generalist business and management education so badly needed in today's highly complex, interrelated, and multinational world of business and management. In fact, in many ways it appears as though management and business education today suffers from an obsession with education for a career - absent education for life.

Unfortunately, many business and management faculty and administrators, although often guided by AACSB standards, appear insensitive to the need for change in business and management curriculum and course design.

A study recently conducted by Roger L. Jenkins, Dean of Graduate Business Programs of the University of Tennessee, and reported in The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 1984, concluded that "the decade of the 1980's favors business training on values to include the perspectives and insights of the humanities." It is Professor Jenkins' idea of the need for a better mixture of business and general education requirements that forms the essential proposition of this article.

LESSONS FORM THE GO-GO YEARS

As business and management educators and administrators, if there is one thing that the past twenty plus years have taught us about management education, it is, or should be, that the best education for a practicing or prospective businessman or manager is not necessarily a business/management education per se. If we

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have not learned that in the past twenty years, we are either very naive or very myopic, or both.

If the past two decades have taught us nothing else about management education, they have most assuredly shown us that a businessman or manager's formal education should include a number of arts and sciences courses - not segregated and separated in time and in space from business and management courses, but integrated throughout the curriculum.

Why - you ask? The answer is really quite simple. Business and management courses per se do little to prepare a student for the realities of discrimination ,moral and ethical decisions, business-government relations,foreign languages and cultures and a multitude of other management and business situations commonplace in today's highly complex and integrated world of both domestic and international business and management. In order to understand the true nature of discrimination problems in management, for example, personnel management and sociology courses might well be taken simultaneously rather than being separated by a year or more of coursework. And in order to gain a more thorough understanding and appreciation for business-government relations, political science courses might best be taken simultaneously with business courses rather than being separated. And the list goes on.

A CASE IN POINT

One of the areas where typical business and management school curriculum are most out of sync with the real world of business and management and the needs of the students, once

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employed, is in the area of writing and speaking skills.

A typical business school curriculum today has students taking two English courses (only one of which usually has a writing load of any consequence), usually in the Freshman year with a possible technical and scientific writing course in the third semester. While it can be argued that students need the "baseline writing skills" acquired in Freshman English, that does not suggest that writing (nor speaking) courses need be limited to 2 or 3 courses and confined to the first year or two of a four year program.

This is a particularly grevious problem because, in fact, most business school graduates write very poorly and possess only scarcely better oral communication skills upon exit from business/management schools, as borne out by a recent empirical investigation of the factors or skills considered to be most important by employers.

SURVEY RESULTS

A survey of almost 200 personnel managers from among the major employers in the greater Rocky Mountain area revealed that the seven courses or types of classes considered by employers to be most important in preparing students for management - administrative positions were as shown below in Table I.

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TABLE I

Courses/Classes Considered Most Valuable in Preparing Students for Management/Administrative Positions

Rank Order	
1	Written Communications
2	Personnel Management
3	General Management/Policies
4	Financial Management
5	Oral Communications
6	Ethics in Management
7	Current Issues in Management

Of particular interest in these research results is the following:

(1) written and oral communications courses were two of the seven most important courses

(2) arguably three and perhaps four of the remaining five courses have or should have substantial elements of "arts and science" or "humanities" content.

And yet over the past two decades the amount of written and oral communication coursework required of business/management students has been a constant decline - in part, no doubt, because in days of declining university enrollments, budget cuts, and fiscal accountability, professional schools, such as business and management schools, covet and hoard the greatest possible numoer of students.

Unfortunately the trend toward greater functional specialization in business courses per se - at the expense of humanities (general education) type courses - over the past two decades may well be backfiring on schools and colleges of business and management amid the crescendoing chorus of irrelevance being heard today from both employers and graduating business students.

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THE AT&T STUDY

The most comprehensive management studies ever undertaken were undertaken in 1956 by AT&T. The results of that study, recently released, should be startling, to say the least, to business and management educators. Over time, the researchers found that liberal arts students were shown to be the best managers. The study was a longitudinal study of the career paths, management practices, and success or failure of over 600 managers chosen at random from several of the pre-1984 AT&T operating telephone companies.

Why liberal arts students you ask? The answer is complex and often not easily understood - among the explanations are the following:

(1) long term managerial value in any organization depends as much or more on good communications skills, written and oral, than it does on a functional business knowledge and skills, and liberal arts students generally have far better communications skills than business students;

(2) organizations of all types, public and private, generally insist on creativity and innovation in their managers over the long haul - traits and abilities more carefully nutured and developed in humanities type curriculum than in traditional business/management school curriculum;

(3) long term upward mobility in career paths is generally impeded by the "functional specialist mind set" of most business school graduates - many of whom have great difficulty shedding the cloak of their technical specialty in favor of the generalist view and posture required in the upper middle level and executive levels of most organizations.

Whatever the precise reasons for the AT&T study findings, the message to business and management educators and administrators is clear and concise - business and general education curriculum must be more carefully integrated in the

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interest of preparing the best managers for today's complex interrelated world of business and management.

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

An example of the inability of business/management students to integrate what they had learned, or supposedly learned, in "non-business" courses during the first two years of their coursework, with what they were studying in their business program came vividly to my attention recently when I taught an International/Multinational Business/Management course at the Junior/Senior level. I was astounded to learn in a pre-assessment exam I gave on the first day of class that the students:

(1) could name an average of only 11 of 150 plus countries recognized by the United Nations as sovereign states;

(2) could name the foreign exchange currencies of an average of only five countries;

(3) knew little or nothing about the United Nations and its component parts;

(4) could identify an average of only one of the world's major cultural regions;

(5) knew virtually nothing about the development and evolution of world power from a historical perspective;

(6) understood virtually nothing about the relationship between the U. S. Balance of Payments and foreign trade policy and the domestic well-being of the United States;

(7) failed to comprehend the significance and impact of cultural, language, and nationalistic tendencies in doing business in differing multinational environments - and the list goes on.

These were upper division business students who should have learned many of these things in geography, history, political

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science, sociology, and other courses. And while not every business student needs to be an expert in International Business, this experience reinforced in my mind two important ideas in the search for a more relevant management education.

(1) currently in most business and management curriculum, general education and business courses are taught in almost mutual exclusivity - to the extent that students have great difficulty with transition to and integration of material learned from the first two to the last two years of a typical business or management education;

(2) there is a real need to re-examine the way we prepare and educate business and management students. In the case of International Business courses, for example, students need a foundation in the following courses at a minimum:

* political science
* economics
* domestic business functions
* sociology
* anthropology
* law
* geography
* history
* languages and others

And it might be well to be a little more creative in the way in which we integrate such courses rather than placing so much emphasis on segregation of the courses.

EMERGING FORCES

There are, at a minimum, three major forces at work in the world that dictate that such an integration of courses must be so in order for management and business education to maintain a semblance of relevance.

(1) High Technology Impacts - the more high technology oriented our society becomes the greater the pressure on management and business students to develop analytical and quantitative skills - skills best learned in non-business courses such as math, logic, and other arts and sciences courses.

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(2) Growing Importance of International Business - increasingly the domestic economic well being of the U.S. is becoming tied to world markets as the search for resources and markets intensifies and grows through multinational expansion. Unfortunately, the baseline skills and knowledge required to understand and comprehend those issues and work in those environments is found not in business classes but in arts and sciences classes.

(3) Increasing Complexity of Business and Management - as each year passes the environment and operation of business and management becomes more complex - with increasing business-government regulation, international interdependance,and related developments. As the environment and operation of business becomes more and more complex and interdependent, it becomes more and more important for managers and business students to be able to comprehend and deal with broader "global and generic issues."

CONCLUSION

In short, it seems imperative that we reassess the way in which we educate business and management students. Should we fail to do so, we run the risk, as management and business educators, of continuing to produce functional specialists on the short road to functional obsolescence for both students and business and management education. Much like the prehistoric dinosaurs who vanished waiting for a change in the weather, it is imperative for management and business educators and administrators to carefully assess the environment into which students are being graduated because there is strong evidence suggesting that the environment is no longer compatible with the beast or that the beast and its creators are not adapting well to those environmental changes. And waiting for a change in the weather is not the answer. Perhaps the place to start is with a re-examination of accreditation standards and policies or curriculum design.

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